

Education Transition Strategy



Government of the District of Columbia

Adrian M. Fenty, Mayor

April 27, 2007

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Background

On April, 19, 2007, the Council of the District of Columbia approved the “District of Columbia Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007,” Mayor Adrian M. Fenty’s plan to restructure the governance over the DC Public Schools. The plan, introduced during the Mayor’s first days in office, gives Mayor Fenty direct oversight over and responsibility for the school system. However, the Mayor does not have legal authority over the schools until the bill is approved by the United States Congress.

Until that time, Mayor Fenty has developed a plan to prepare for an orderly transfer. The process will be similar to the work of the Fenty Transition that preceded the Mayor’s oath of office in early January. Mayor Fenty has committed to working just as diligently to prepare for this critical responsibility— that of educating the District’s young people and preparing them to compete in a global economy.

Fixing the Material Weakness

The Fiscal Year 2006 Independent Auditor’s report cited certain administrative processes of the DC Public Schools as presenting a material weakness, meaning its accounting irregularities could jeopardize the District’s financial standing. The Auditor did so for five reasons:

1. High-risk designation by the U.S. Department of Education
2. High-risk designation by the DC Office of the Inspector General
3. Procurement
4. Human Resources systems
5. Medicaid

The Mayor, Chief Financial Officer, Schools Superintendent and President of the Board of Education have selected the consulting firm KPMG to correct the material weakness identified by the city’s auditors. This will be the most effective way of correcting problems and ensuring they do not appear in next year’s audit.

A task force from the Office of the Chief Financial Officer has been working with DCPS management since January to develop a plan to correct internal controls. This task force met with the external auditors and the Department of Education. While members developed corrective action plans for each area, they quickly realized the need for additional resources and an outside perspective.

Reviewing the System

Beginning immediately, the Mayor will initiate various internal reviews of DCPS components to inform future management decisions. Independent firms will conduct these audits, quickly bringing capacity and expertise to longstanding problems. These reviews will address fiscal and operating weaknesses of the school system and will include:



- Forensic audit. The Mayor will conduct a forensic audit to identify areas of waste, fraud, and abuse within the school system's operations. The audit will identify the best, most efficient possible uses of public resources, and recommend actions to restore public confidence in the system.
- Financial review and development of an updated budget. The Mayor intends to conduct a full review of how the budget is allocated within the school system to identify areas of potential savings. His first priority is to better support academic initiatives and protect investments made for classrooms. Upon completion of this review, the Mayor anticipates developing an updated budget that reflects the findings and his priorities.
- Operational review. A thorough review of the school system's operations will reveal ways to reorganize the central administration – supporting teaching and learning first, and facilitating reform.
- Analysis of state education costs. The State Education Office is working with a number of experts in state education policy, integration and merger, and agency performance who will lay the groundwork for the new structure of the state education agency. This work will provide an analysis of the costs associated with building a state agency that is reflective of best practices.

In addition, there will be an ongoing comprehensive management review. The Mayor will use the data, analyses, and recommendations from the reviews described above to make decisions about the management and direction of the school system as appropriate.

Reaching Out to the Community

- Education Town Halls
Given the success of community town halls during the mayoral transition period, the Mayor will conduct similar meetings about schools throughout the District of Columbia. Mayor Fenty and his education team will hear, in structured forums, from the people whom this change will impact most—parents, teachers and students. Findings from Fenty Transition town halls served as an effective guide in understanding residents' concerns and developing administration priorities. The Education Town Hall series will seek to accomplish the same goals.

For a schedule of upcoming Education Town Halls, please visit the Mayor's education page at <http://www.dc.gov/educationreform> or call the Mayor's Call Center at 727-1000.
- eTransition Activities
The eTransition efforts will use the power of technology to create forums through interactive Web logs--or blogs. Like those of the Fenty Transition, these forums will be designed to encourage dialogue. This input will be a way of sharing information while gaining invaluable input from community members.
- Communication with School-Based Staff
Mayor Fenty will send letters to teachers, principals, and other school-based staff, committing his support to their vital work and inviting their important input. He will invite school personnel to attend the Education Town Halls and stress the importance of cooperation to improve educational outcomes for our students.

- myschoolideas@dc.gov

The Mayor is excited to announce the creation of an email address to collect and review public ideas for improving teaching and learning in your schools. Staff will regularly review emails sent to myschoolideas@dc.gov, and Mayor Fenty will consider all ideas as he prepares for the coming school year.

Searching for an Ombudsman

The Office of Ombudsman for Public Education is a centerpiece of the Mayor's education reform plan. The Ombudsman will serve as a single point of contact for parents and teachers to communicate their concerns and receive assistance in resolving problems. Finding the right person for the job, and for the District, is of vital importance. The Mayor will look in the District, around the region and across the country to fill the position as soon as possible. In the meantime, the Deputy Mayor for Education is leading preparation efforts to ensure that the new Ombudsman can begin serving residents immediately.

Raising Funds

The District must have significant resources ready to support education reform initiatives – resources that may be above what is funded through the city's budget. At the same time, the District is lucky to have an abundance of organizations, businesses, and individuals who wish to support education reform efforts. The change of governance and renewed vision for our schools present a unique opportunity to harness the willingness of those who want to give.

Through a coordinated campaign, the Mayor will engage partners from every sector and identify tangible ways for them to support specific programs and initiatives. The intent is to build a pool of resources that can be used for strategic investments, maximizing the reach of the District's reform efforts.

Transferring State Functions

Several components of the State Education Office's (SEO) transition efforts are currently underway. First, the SEO is in the process of hiring an internal transition team to help consolidate state-level functions. Secondly, the SEO is working with outside experts to develop a new structure for a high-performing state education agency.

The SEO's transition effort also involves working with the State Board of Education. State Education Officer Deborah Gist has reached out to each board member individually and is working to set up a retreat with the board in the near future. The SEO has also identified internal staff to lead transition work groups around specific policy efforts and functional operations. The work groups will engage the entities that will be merged into the SEO. Ensuring a culture of inclusion is the highest priority for the SEO during the merger of functions.

Finally, in accordance with the language in the DC Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007, the State Education Office is developing a detailed transition plan for the Mayor's review. This plan will ultimately go to the Council of the District of Columbia. Through these efforts, the SEO envisions a structure built around broad policy objectives to improve student achievement and align standards with college and workforce expectations.



Visiting Schools

In the coming weeks, Mayor Fenty, Deputy Mayor for Education Victor Reinoso and staff will visit DCPS and public charter schools across the city. The Mayor and his team will meet with students, teachers and administrators at every level, in every kind of school. These visits will serve as an enormous source of information about the incredible student body, hardworking teachers and successful initiatives in schools around the District of Columbia. The information gained during each visit will give the Mayor an on-the-ground understanding of each public school. The Mayor is determined to support all public schools in their mission to provide quality education to students, and these site visits serve a vital role in that preparation.

Improving Facilities

The school system has begun a short-term program to address many of the immediate problems, such as the lack of clean, functioning bathrooms and classrooms with poor lighting and climate control. The Mayor will develop a “buff and scrub” plan to accelerate facility repairs so every student can attend school in a safe, clean learning environment. Mayor Fenty is exploring ways to engage the private sector to augment maintenance and repair capacity within the school system. As part of the management review of the system described earlier, he will develop a program that meets the urgency of the school facilities crisis.

Engaging Developers

As part of the Facilities Improvement Plan, the Mayor will create a Developers’ Education Roundtable. Developers from around the region who do business in the District of Columbia will be invited to “adopt” schools to help provide supplies, repairs and upkeep for a determined period of time. A partnership between business and city education efforts is the perfect joint venture, because public school students will make up the workforce of the future.

Conclusion

The first day of classes for the 2007-08 school year is August 27. Mayor Fenty is committed to dramatic, meaningful changes that students, parents and teachers will notice immediately after the summer recess. Nothing less than the future of our city is at stake. This is an exciting, historic moment of opportunity for the public schools and the entire District of Columbia.

